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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to see whether the people of Burundi would learn English more efficiently if it were presented through the people's native language, Kirundi, rather than through French. Five components were determined for the experiment: lexicon, structure, conversation, pronunciation, and spelling. A survey of 23 advanced students in a university English department revealed divided opinions on the question. A survey of M.A. theses on the subject revealed that only one had advocated teaching English directly from Kirundi. This experiment attempts to test the thesis that the English tense system and the English language in general can be taught efficiently through the use of Kirundi for explanations. For about one month 375 students in their first year of secondary studies were taught some rudiments of English sounds, vocabulary, spelling, structure, or conversational skills. All had studied French for four years. Similar Kirundi and French groups were chosen in the same schools; ten short teaching programs were prepared and carried out by graduate psycholinguistics students. Higher performances were achieved in all groups taught directly from Kirundi, except in pronunciation. Lesson scripts and tests used in the experiment are appended. (AMH)

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Henry Niedzielski

TEACHING ENGLISH IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

1. Introduction

As many people know, English has replaced French as the main language used for international communication. This process of substitution, noted already in the first half of this century, has recently gained momentum in some "French speaking" African countries. One example of this gradual loss of French to English can be witnessed in Burundi. It was made clear on April 22, 1981 when the minister of National Education proclaimed, at the seminar for secondary school teachers of English in Burundi, that the ambition of the Burundi government is to make the country trilingual in Kirundi, French, and English.

However, the teaching of English in Burundi suffers from many problems, some of them inherited from the colonial days.

Introduced in the late fifties by the Belgians, it was taught more or less like Greek or Latin. Slowly, after obtaining their independence, Burundi have come to realize its importance as the language of communication both regionally and internationally. Presently, in the secondary schools it is given the same number of instruction hours as French, and at the post-secondary level it is a compulsory subject in all institutions and in all departments. It is also taught on

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the radio, where it was first introduced with French explanations and now presented in Kiswahili. We thus observe the first problem. At least 95% of the Burundi population speaks Kirundi as the native language, yet English is taught through another language, mostly French.

This observation led me to conduct an experiment to check the question whether Burundi would learn English more efficiently if it were presented with occasional explanations in Kirundi rather than in French.

2. The Problem

Interferences caused by the linguistic background of the FL learner may vary with the skill being acquired. Therefore, five components were determined for this experiment: lexicon, structure, conversation, pronunciation, and spelling. Actually, this division was dictated partly by the fact that investigation was carried out by eleven students in psycholinguistics and that there were ten classes available in Bujumbura for the experiment. It was also influenced by the opinions collected in short essays written by 23 advanced students in the department of English on the topic of "Present linguistic and other interferences in the learning of English in Burundi". The following statements summarize these students' thinking.

2.1 Lexicon

Since some words are better known in French than in Kirundi and many are graphically and/or semantically similar, the class felt that vocabulary might be taught better through French rather than through Kirundi.

However, in some situations and because of cultural contexts some lexical items are easier to understand through Kirundi than through French (eg. small pox, petite vérole, and akarandi). Another minor danger in teaching vocabulary through French is caused by the abundance of deceptive cognates (eg. parents, parents, relatives).

2.2 Structure

English grammar might be better approached from French because both languages share many structures and classify their parts of speech in a similar manner. Kirundi, for instance, has no articles and no real relative pronouns.

On the other hand the English tense system could possibly be taught more efficiently through a direct contrast with the two main groups of Kirundi auxiliaries of aspect (Mategeko 1971:123).

2.3 Conversation

Here again opinions were divided. Because culture shapes the way of thinking (Whorf's hypothesis), and since there are many more similar cultural contexts in French and in English, English conversational skills should be built on situations with which the students are already familiar in French.

Others felt that materials should be created and adapted from Kirundi by building on speech acts and speech modes equivalent to those familiar to Barundi in Burundi speech situations.

2.4 Pronunciation

Presently, the teaching of pronunciation is introduced through the IPA. Students suggested that the English phonological system should be introduced gradually through contrasts with the Kirundi phonological system which is much less complicated than the French. Phonetic notation could be introduced much later for reinforcement.

2.5 Composition

Most Barundi students perform on a much lower level in writing than orally. It might be due to the facts that eloquence is

highly valued in Rundi culture and that, until recently, written literature did not exist. Therefore, developing and organizing techniques already acquired in French could be utilized.

2.6 General Problems

A certain percentage of students speak Kiswahili instead of Kirundi. There is also a shortage of local teachers, and European teachers--mostly Belgians--do not know Kirundi nor Kiswahili. Ideally, the English teacher would need a working knowledge of English, French, Kirundi, and Kiswahili. It will still take a few years before a sufficient number of so qualified Barundi is ready to teach.

Finally, there are no texts in Kirundi, because the language of instruction has been French, even to the extent that University courses in Kirundi literature or culture are taught in French.

3. Previous Research

A thorough analysis of various "mémoires" (equivalent to U.S. M.A. theses) did not reveal any formal interest in the teaching of English directly from Kirundi. The general assumption has been that English could, should, and would be taught through French.

Interviews with various methodologists and program writers at the BEPES (Bureau d'Etudes Pédagogiques de l'Enseignement Secondaire=Planning and Programming Office for Secondary Schools), have confirmed this lack of interest in the teaching of English directly from Kirundi. Nobody had even thought of doing it. This may be explained by the fact that until recently both English and Kirundi were studied as an additional language by French majors. It seems, therefore, traditionally logical that the teaching of English should be based on a good knowledge of French.

The only notable exception to this state of affairs has been a M.A. thesis written in 1971 by a Murundi on a Fulbright granted at the UCLA. Zacharie Mategeko, the present chairman of the English department at the University of Burundi, wrote in his introduction to A Contrastive Analysis of Parts of the English and Kirundi Tense Systems that Kirundi can efficiently be used in the teaching of the English tense system and of the English language in general.

Ten years later this statement had not yet been tested. This experiment is the first attempt at doing it.

4. The Method

4.1 The Subjects

Altogether 375 students distributed in ten different groups were taught in May 1981 some rudiments of English sounds, vocabulary, spelling, structure, or conversational skills. They were all first year students in Bujumbura secondary schools, who had studied French for about four years and would start studying English the next year. Table 11 shows how many people made up each group. There were only 43 females, 42 in the two conversational groups and one in the French pronunciation group.

The age of the students ranged from 12 to 21 years, the average being 16 for the boys and 15 for the girls. Between 20 and 40% of them come from Bujumbura and some of them may know Kiswahili better than Kirundi. The remainder come from up country and are native speakers of Kirundi. Parallel Kirundi and French groups were chosen in the same schools in order to ensure that the socio-cultural background would be identical and that the only decisive variable would be the use of French or Kirundi in the experiment.

4.2 The Instrument

Ten short teaching programs were written, discussed and dry run in my psycholinguistics class.. They are represented in tables 1 through 5. It will be noted that they lasted 45 minutes except for pronunciation and conversation which took 55 minutes.

All writing groups were tested within the same class period. The members of the conversation and pronunciation groups, which required oral testing were examined individually during the next class period under such conditions that no communication took place among testees. Each one was questioned by the same experimenting university student with another one evaluating the answers. All tests are described in tables 6 through 10.

5. The Results

A synopsis of results is found in table 11. Higher performances were achieved in all groups taught directly from Kirundi, except in pronunciation where those who had been taught through French obtained better results.

The total number of errors and the average number of errors per student in each group are shown to give a quantitative indication of overall performance of the various groups and to

provide a comparison between the Kirundi and the French groups for each skill under study. The average score in percentile is not computed on the basis of the average number of errors subtracted from the perfect score. Rather it is derived from a formula multiplying a perfect score by the number of students in a group, then subtracting from this total perfect score the number of errors in that group, and finally dividing this remainder by the number of individuals in the group. It seems that this approach helps to spread the numerical results.

Conscious that for each group of individuals, statistics may be misleading because of a few unusually high or unusually low performers, all computations were redone after eliminating about 10% of the top students and 10% of the bottom students in each group. The results appear in the lower half of table 11.

6. Conclusions and Implications

First of all, it is remarkable that all Kirundi groups performed better than the French groups except the pronunciation group. The results obtained can be construed as an indication that Barundi teenagers can learn English more efficiently directly from their native, home language.

In fact, we have seen that a serious attempt was made to reduce all socio-cultural and physiological variables by choosing each

set of parallel groups in the same school. In addition, psychological factors influencing the teaching and/or learning processes were also given full consideration. The student teacher in each group was convinced of the superiority of his/her approach and tried to share his/her enthusiasm with the subjects. The latter reacted to the experiment in an overwhelmingly positive manner.

The results obtained in the pronunciation groups were somewhat puzzling. A more thorough analysis has revealed several reasons which lead us to conclude that this section of the experiment lacks validity. We have seen (tables 5 and 10) that only consonants had been taught and tested. Out of these consonants, the most frequently reported as mispronounced were [r] 89 times in Kirundi, 30 in French, [θ] 112 times in Kirundi, 52 times in French, and [ʃ] 130 times in Kirundi, 64 times in French. These three sounds do not exist in Kirundi nor in French, and they account for way over half of the errors in both French and Kirundi groups. On the other hand, those sounds which exist in Kirundi were reported as mispronounced more frequently in the French groups. This suggests that greater differences in phonetic features cause greater difficulties. But why should the Kirundi group have scored lower than the French group on difficult sounds? At least two possibilities may have existed. The subjects may have been more attentive in French because they were

already working in a foreign language, and the student teacher may have been stricter. To control the latter factor, the experiment could be repeated with a jury of at least three better trained examiners, the same for both groups. It is, therefore, recommended that a new experiment testing phonetic acquisition be conducted. It should also contain vowel sounds because table 12 shows much greater differences between the French and English vowel systems than between the Kirundi and the English vowel systems. The hypothesis would be that the Kirundi group would perform better, based on the observation reported above that the greater the difference between the source and the target language phonology the greater the difficulty.

In the spelling section, the number of words which could have influenced by French was reduced to the minimum in order not to favor either Kirundi or French group. In addition, the word school was chosen because its cognate in Kirundi is ishule. Professor was misspelled more frequently in Kirundi, often with only one s; exercise was once misspelled in French as exercice; coffee was spelled with one f three times in the Kirundi group. There are no double consonants in Kirundi. A new experiment could use French English cognates (of which there are over eleven thousand). Preferably, they would be introduced without contrasting English with French in the Kirundi group. In the present experiment no similarities or differences were pointed

out.

All in all, it is probably too premature to draw any definite conclusion or recommendation for a preferable teaching approach. However, the results obtained encourage us to suggest that more thought should be given to the teaching of English directly from Kirundi. Since the subjects in this experiment are going to begin learning English next year, a longitudinal study could be conducted over the year with parallel Kirundi-French sections in the schools where this experiment took place.

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LEXICON (LESSON SCRIPT)

Objective: By the end of this lesson pupils should be able to translate or use in context all the words and expressions taught.

Introduction: A few words in order to create a context, a good atmosphere.

- 3' Greetings: Good morning
Good morning sir
Good morning everybody

Presentation: What is your name?
My name is ...

- 15' Words often used in class:
Pronounce the words, while writing them on the board, explain them through the direct method and/or French (or Kirundi).
Use short repetition drills

Answer	Stand up	Thank you
Good	That group	There
Repeat	Come here	Get up
This group	Sit down	Teacher

- 30' Words often used generally:
Teach as above, concentrating on logical collocations

Verbs:

To sing	To drink
To open	To drive
To close	To wear
To do	To write

Nouns:

A song	milk
the door	a letter
bananas	clothes
homework	a car

TABLE 1

SPELLING (LESSON SCRIPT)

Objective: By the end of this lesson pupils should be able to spell correctly 15 words either dictated to them or presented in writing with faulty spelling.

1'-2' Introduction: (as in the vocabulary class)

45' Words referring to items identifiable in the classroom

blackboard	lesson	pencil	watch	coffee
school	exercise	wall	tea	
chalk	English	window	book	
chair	pen	door	professor	

The teacher writes one word at the time in block letters, reads it, has students repeat it and write. The teacher circulates among rows to check spelling. Difficult spellings (e.g. coffee, school) are given more attention. After all words are written on the board, the teacher erases them, students rewrite them one by one.

TABLE 2

GRAMMAR (LESSON SCRIPT)

Objective: By the end of this lesson, pupils should be able to conjugate the verb to be in the present indicative.

1'-2' Introduction (as in other classes, c.f. Lexicon)

45' Teaching

1. Explain the meaning of to be by comparing it with French (or Kirundi), every person of the present tense.

Students repeat to be

2. Conjugate first 3 persons of to be

The teacher pronounces each personal form, writes it on the board, students repeat and write on their notebook:

I am Mary

You are Didace

He is Tharcisse

She is Thérèse

3. Conjugate plural forms (after checking that everyone is able to produce the singular forms) - Same procedure as above.

We are Mary and Gilbert

You are Elice and Joseph

They are Dieudonné and Cyprien

(explain meaning of and by comparing it with et or na)

4. Review all forms in chorus, then individually.

TABLE 3

CONVERSATION (LESSON SCRIPT)

Objective: By the end of this lesson, pupils should be able to exchange basic greetings and answer six questions about him/herself

1'-2' Introduction: (As in other classes)

55' Teaching: The sentences to be tested are introduced one by one (see the test).

The students repeat in groups and then answer individually the teacher and among themselves in pairs.

TABLE 4

PRONUNCIATION (LESSON SCRIPT)

Objective: By the end of this lesson, pupils should be able to discriminate and repeat the following sounds presented in single words: [p,b],[t,d],[r,l],[f,v],[s,z],[ʃ,ʒ],[tʃ,dʒ],[ð,θ],[n,ŋ]. (All these consonants, except [r,ð,θ,ŋ] exist in Kirundi but in different distribution and environment)

1'-2' Introduction (As in other classes)

55' Teaching (Similar to conversation) When students have discriminated correctly, they repeat. All the words will be tested as presented in the teaching phase.

TABLE 5

TEST DE VOCABULAIRE
(10 minutes--15 points)

Nom
Prénom
Etablissement
Classe
Nc:

Date:

I. Complétez avec you, here, down ou up

exemple: To get.... Réponse To get up

1. stand

3. sit

2. come

4. thank

II. Joignez avec une flèche un mot de la 1ère colonne
et un autre de la 2ème colonne pour former une
expression logique.

exemple: To drive clothes
To wear a car

1. To eat

2. a homework

To drink

the door

To write

bananas

To sing

milk

To close

a letter

To do

a song

III. Traduisez les mots suivants:

1. ce groupe-ci

4. répétez

exemple: là-bas = there

2. un enseignant

5. bien

3. une réponse

TABLE 6

Nom
Prénom
Etablissement
Classe
No:

TEST D'ORTHOGRAPHE
(5 minutes--15 points)

1. Soulignez le mot écrit correctement
(underline every word correctly spelled)

Ex. WACH	1. BLACKBOARD	2. SCHOL	3. EXERCISE	4. DOR
<u>WATCH</u>	BLACKBORD	SCHOOL	EXECISE	DOORE
WOTCH	BLACKBARD	SCHUL	EXCERSIZE	DOOR

2. Corrigez l'orthographe des mots suivants:
(Correct all spelling mistakes)

Ex. TI — TEA	5. CHOLK _____	8. COFEE _____
	6. CHER _____	9. PENSIL _____
	7. LESSEN _____	

3. Dictée

10.	(BOOK)	12.	(WINDOW)	14.	(ENGLISH)
11.	(PROFESSOR)	13.	(WALL)	15.	(PEN)

TABLE 7

Nom
Prénom
Etablissement
Classe
No:

TEST DE GRAMMAIRE
(5 minutes--10 points)

1. Mettez les pronoms personnels qui conviennent.
(Complete with the correct personal pronouns)

Exemple: are Jeanne. You are Jeanne

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. is Mary. | 4. are Nahimana. |
| 2. is Paul. | 5. am Pierre. |
| 3. are Mary and Spéa. | |

2. Remplissez les espaces vides par la forme correcte du verbe "to be" (Fill the blanks with the appropriate form of to be)

Exemple: You André. You are André.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| 6. He André. | 9. she Pauline? |
| 7. They Paul and Jacques. | 10. You Jean. |
| 8. I Agnès. | |

TABLE 8

Nom
Prénom
Etablissement
Classe
No:

TEST DE CONVERSATION
(about 2 minutes--8 points)

Professor (Professeur):

Pupil (Elève):

1. Good morning (pupil's name nom de l'élève) How are you? I'm fine too, thank you	Good morning teacher Fine thank you, and you?
2. What's your name? Where do you live? What is your country? Do you like milk? Do you like tea? What do you prefer?	My name is (pupil's name) I live in (address) My country is Burundi Yes, I like milk (No, I don't like milk) Yes, I like tea (No, I don't like tea) I prefer milk (I prefer tea)

This is conducted orally with pupils coming one by one and
not able to communicate with others.

TABLE 9

TEST DE PRONONCIATION

(2 minutes--49 points)

Date:

Nom
Prénom
Etablissement
Classe
No:

1. Discrimination. Reconnaître les sons en marquant pour chaque groupe le signe V quand toutes les consonnes visées sont semblables et le signe — quand elles sont différentes. (For each group of words, indicate whether the consonants under study are identical V or different—)

Exemple: 1. medal 2. medal 3. metal 1. —
[t,d] metal medal metal 2. V
metal medal metal 3. V

(eleven groups tested [p,b], [f,v], [t,d], [s,z], [ʃ,ʒ], [tʃ,dʒ], [ð,θ].

2. Répétition. Ecoutez attentivement et répétez
(38 points) (Listen carefully and repeat)

[b] book	[l] law	[r] very	[ŋ] thing	[tʃ,dʒ] church
beat	line	around	along	chair
blind	lie	where	king	chin
		rare	sing	judge
		ground		John
				jingle

the	[ð,θ]		[ʃ,ʒ]	shine
other		then		direction
this		that		share
these		those		measure
thing		thank		
thin		thief		
think		three		

(The second part was done individually, like for conversation test.)

TABLE 10

	LEXICON VOCABULAIRE		STRUCTURE GRAMMAIRE		CONVERSATION		PRONUNCIATION PRONONCIATION		SPELLING ORTHOGRAPHE	
	Fr.	Kir.	Fr.	Kir.	Fr.	Kir.	Fr.	Kir.	Fr.	Kir.
Total number of students Nombre total d'étudiants	38	38	40	43	20	22	44	41	44	43
Total number of errors Nombre total d'erreurs	135	82	37	36	41	42	546	514	89	77
Errors per student Moyenne d'erreurs par étudiant	3.55	2.15	0.92	0.83	2.05	1.90	12.40	12.53	2.02	1.79
Total points possible Maximum de points	15	15	10	10	8	8	49	49	15	15
Average score in % Note moyenne en %	76.31	85.66	90.75	91.62	74.37	76.23	74.67	74.40	86.51	88.06
No. of students minus top 10% and minus bottom 10%										
No. d'étudiants moins 20% (10% meilleurs et 10% moins bons)	30	30	32	33	16	16	34	33	34	33
Total errors of 80% students Nombre d'erreurs pour les 80%	110	53	19	15	28	20	331	417	60	51
Errors per student Moyenne d'erreurs par étudiant	3.66	1.76	0.59	0.45	1.75	1.25	9.73	12.63	1.76	1.54
Average score in % Note moyenne en %	75.6	88.26	94.1	95.5	78.12	84.37	80.14	74.22	88.26	89.13

TABLE 11

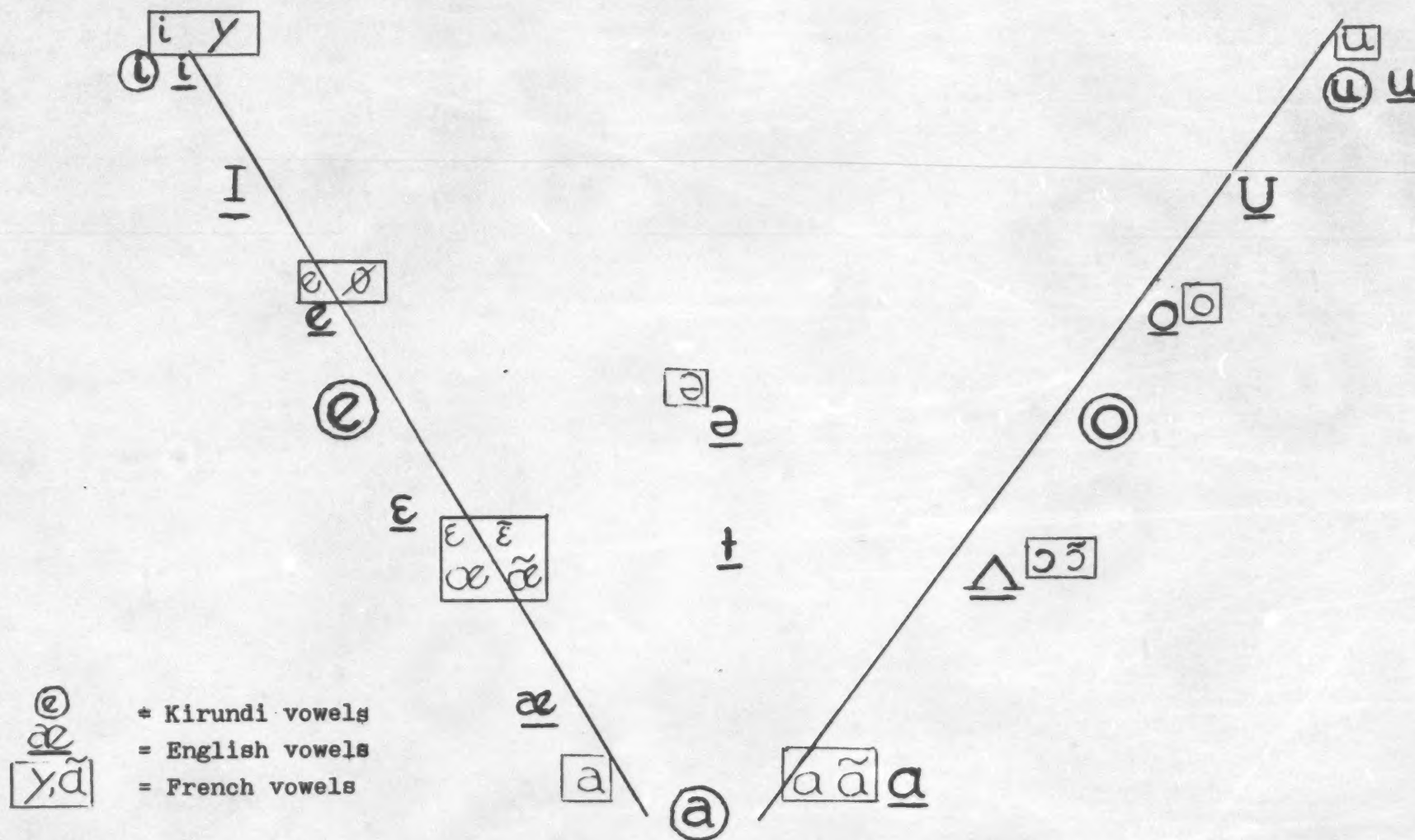


TABLE 12